

Gender Sensitization of Media about Violence against Women



Sociology

KEYWORDS : Gender Awareness, Media, Violence against Women

Dr. Ra'ana Malik

Department of Gender Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore Pakistan

ABSTRACT

The study is based on the opinion of 280 media personnel working in different capacities in newspapers and TV channels. They were randomly selected from four major cities in Pakistan, namely, Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad and Peshawar. In-depth interviews were taken from the participants. The findings of the study provide evidence about the attitudes of media personnel regarding gender equality and violence against women.

Introduction

Feminist media theory argues that because men control society's dominant institutions, it is their values – and not women's – that are given space and time in the mass media (De Bruin, 1995). Further, media has marginalized women in the public sphere; in other words, women's concerns are trivialized and separated from 'national' issues in public discourse and the mainstream media (Balakrishnan, 1994). Media purveys stereotypes of gender roles; for example bank advertisements for savings show parents putting away money for their son's education and their daughter's marriage, rather than the other way around. Production and content of media are gendered; media content or messages cater specifically to either men or women; for example, sports news for men and soap operas for women. Reception of media is gendered; how media content is interpreted and what is watched depends on gender differences in the audience. Female alternative offers alternative criteria of quality; for example, feature stories on maternal health will be seen differently in terms of quality from hard political stories in the news. The personal is political; domestic violence, for example, takes place privately, but is an issue with broader social implications. Negative and stereotypical images of women in the media, and the ways in which the media reports gender-based violence (as a lesser crime or violation), contributes to the acceptance of gender-based violence (GMMP, 2010).

In a patriarchal society like Pakistan, many forms of violence against women are so deeply imbedded in the socio-cultural-tribal structure that they are taken for granted. Starting from the low social status of women in Pakistan to the problems that arise due to general poverty in the country, to the gender biased distribution of powers and resources in the family and society, there are countless acts of violence where women are treated as commodities and not human beings. These patriarchal norms and values encourage discrimination against women throughout their life cycles. There has been some media initiative in the recent years on raising awareness about gender based violence through press, radio and television as well as through street and interactive theatre, but in boarder terms, there has not been enough public debate or discussion on these issues. Indeed, many women are not aware of their legal rights and what protections they have against all forms of violence. One of the reasons for this ignorance is the male domination of the media. Those who make up nearly half the population comprise only a tiny fraction of the newsrooms and news story subjects. It is men who decide what news, views and visuals are to be heard, read and seen. Another reason is gender prejudices and biases of media practitioners' to the diverse portrayals of women, and to their voices in the media. Journalists and editors are socialized as men and as women, long before they choose journalism as a career. This gender role socialization influences how the media reports on portrays and provides access to women. Infact, the mass media and the new information and communications technologies (ICTs) contributes to spreading a stereotyped image of women that reinforces their subordination in a patriarchal society.

Objectives

- ❖ Explore the understanding of media personnel towards women's issues particularly violence against women;

- ❖ Find out the gender role socialization patterns of media personnel;
- ❖ Analyze the gender portrayal in media;

Methodology

Sample

The study involved 280 journalists, anchors and other media personnel (both from print and electronic media) randomly selected working in different capacities in the four provincial capitals of Pakistan namely Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad and Peshawar.

Instrument

An interview schedule was developed to know the opinion and understanding of media personnel regarding media's role for gender equality. A basic information sheet was also part of the research tool to document the demographic characteristics of the selected sample.

Results

The study reflects the dominance of males in media (both print and electronic). The females available for interviews during data collection constituted only about 10 percent of the total sample. The educational status of majority (90%) of the respondents was graduation and post-graduation. Hence, the selected sample is highly qualified having an insight of the current issues. The males and females had almost similar levels of education. More than three-fourth respondents were in the age range of 20 to 40 years. This shows that the selected sample is the voice of youth of the country. There were only 4.4 percent respondents in the age group of above 50 years.

Gender Stereotyping

The study confirmed the portrayal of common stereotype images of males and females in media. Majority (78%) respondents reported that media projects males as strong, dominant, active whilst females as weak, motherly-natured and passive. It indicates that in spite of having young enthusiastic blood and high qualifications, the media personnel are still very much surrounded by the local social norms and customs. The change in media is coming at a very slow pace and the gender portrayal still revolves around the traditional images of males and females in the society.

Portrayal of Women

About 85% respondents thought that woman's presence is a requisite for the survival of media, particularly in the electronic media. One of the respondents from Islamabad said, "...without women TV become black & white....." More than 90 percent respondents agreed that women are used as a decoration piece and to get attraction of the audience regardless of their need in media. Most of the respondents (68%) agreed that media has a great influence on youth and gender portrayal of roles is followed by them in real life situations.

Working capacity of males and females

The data indicates that males are expected to work better as managers, field reporters, crime reporters, photographers, producers and camera operators whilst females are supposed to work better as anchors, editors and desk reporters in the media

industry. Infact, the perceptions of the media personnel reflects the traditional gender roles assigned to males and females by the society.

Awareness about Violence against Women

About half (47%) respondents defined violence as the exercise of power by a person in order to impose one's decision on the other person. It includes psychological, physical, sexual, verbal and political violence. Only the female respondents considered psychological violence as a kind torture faced by women, whereas males were indifferent about mental torture.

International & National Commitments to Gender Equality

Only few respondents (21.7%) had an understanding of international and national commitments made by Pakistan regarding gender equality and violence against women. The female respondents (28.9%) had comparatively more awareness than male respondents (16.7%). Further, respondents belonging to TV channels had more awareness than other respondents working for print media.

Conclusions

There is dearth of data in the past in this subject area and the results of the present study challenge the preconceived notions about media attitude towards women in Pakistan. Further, the study is an attempt to promote a culture of dialogue with and within media. The dialogue is expected to not only positive gender portrayal in media, but also to create gender sensitized environment and equip media with gender lens.

In Pakistan, gender role socialization patterns are generally different for boys and girls, particularly in areas with low levels of literacy and high poverty. Girls are reared to be docile, obedient whereas boys are supposed to be brave, emotionally stable and bread winner. Women's role is mostly confined to the home busy in child rearing and fulfilling household responsibilities (Davis, 1990). The media follows the pre-defined gender roles ascribed to males and females by the society based on the socio-cultural norms and customs. Women's presence in media, specifically at TV channels is mostly to get attention of the masses. The problems faced by a common woman most of the times do not get attention of the media authorities. Education, health and women rights are given least importance and coverage (Glascock, 2001). Women issues are generally discussed on special days marked for women for instance, 8th March marked as Women's day, 24th Nov-10th Dec as 16 Days of Activism for ending violence against women etc. Special editions are taken out and talk shows, documentaries become the news of the day.

Generally the media personnel are gender insensitive and show indifferent behavior towards women issues. Although the media in Pakistan is becoming supportive towards women in their struggle against discrimination and cases of violence against women are reported more frequently. But, reporting on violence against women that includes domestic and institutional atrocities needs much improvement. The women in the cases of rape are the worst victims. A lot of newspapers report with a bias against these women and reinforce the existing non supportive attitude of the society towards women facing torture and humiliation. As for television coverage of rape and other forms of violence against women, it is noted with most of the times the victims of violent acts are put through double humiliation with extensive and most of the times unnecessary coverage. This is most evident in cases where high government officials are shown visiting the place of crime and sympathizing with the victims and the families. The newspapers especially the Urdu press, uses the most gender-insensitive language, which is not only abusive and sexist, but also extremely judgmental, lacking investigation.

There is a wide difference in the areas of work men and women work in media. Women representation can be seen more in the areas of music, children programmes, morning shows and entertainment programmes. On the same lines in the print media, women scope of work is mostly limited to the women's and children page. Whilst men can be seen covering politics, sports,

business, religious programmes, reality shows and documentaries. The finding is supported by most of researches conducted on this subject (Davis, 1990; De Bruin, 1995; Global Media Monitoring Project, 1995; Signorielli, 2001).

Traditionally, the media world has been male-dominated, globally as well as nationally ((Thompson & Zerbinos, 1997). Men design and define media policies, priorities and agenda including how women are portrayed and presented (Global Media Monitoring Project (1995). The ratio of male-female workers in the media is heavily imbalanced in favor of men resulting in biasness against women in many areas. This biasness affects images of women in the media, and in turn has a negative effect on women's development in a society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a way forward, it is expected that the study will provide guidelines to improve the gender portrayal in media and create awareness among media practitioners.

Reporting Violence against women cases: Given the complexity of reporting on violence against women, it is critical that journalists cross check information they come across during an interview, in official publications or in research and other documents.

Watch Dog: Media now-a-days has become the most powerful institution to develop people's attitude and could bring positive change in the society.

Code of Ethics: There must be written code of ethics for working in media. It must include gender neutral terms and rules for the portrayal of male and female image.

Gender Sensitization Training: There is a dire need of training for people working in media on gender issues. Special focus must be given on understanding the nature and sensitivity of violence against women cases.

Gender Balance in Staff: Ensure equal employment opportunities for women at all levels of the media - management, production and programming, design, administration, technical, and education and training. Positive action programmes, including equal pay for equal work, equal access to training, fair and transparent promotion procedures, targets and timetables and action against sexual harassment.

Gender Portrayal in Media: Promote balanced and diverse media portrayals of women as persons and share their many different life experiences - as professionals, managers, entrepreneurs and mothers - to provide role-models for young women. Further, positive role-models for young males should be provided and avoid reinforcing stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity that perpetuate gender inequalities.

Incentives for Media Personnel: Provide incentives to the media personnel for creative, gender-sensitive reporting in the national, regional as well as local media.

Promoting Local Radio: Introduce, support and extend community radio stations as a way of increasing women's participation and contribution to the media and local economic development, especially in areas of high illiteracy rates.

Regulatory and Monitoring Bodies: There is a need to establish monitoring bodies and media watch groups that survey media and advertising content concerning gender portrayal. Women should also be included in the media self-regulatory committees and other executive committees.

Role of Educational Institutions: The Communication Studies departments at the universities/colleges must include course on "gender and media" in the scheme of studies. The students should be given orientation about gender issues in media; media ethics and gender sensitized reporting.

Future Research: There is a need to undertake national studies on media audiences and the impact on viewers of the content of media products, especially in respect of violence against women.

REFERENCE

- Balakrishnan, V. (1994). "Indigenous Social Norms and Women in Asian Media" in *Women | Empowering Communication: A Resource Book on Women and the Globalization of Media*. London: WAAC. | Davis, M. D. (1990). Portrayals of women in prime-time network television: Some demographic characteristics. *Sex Roles*, 23 (5), 325-332. | De Bruin, M (1995). "Gender and the Context of Media Work" in *Media, Gender and Development: A Resource Book for Journalists*. Jamaica: CARIMAC. | Glascock, J. (2001). Gender roles on prime-time network television: Demographics and behaviors. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45(4), 656-669. | Global Media Monitoring Project (1995). *Women's Participation in the News*. National Watch on Images of Women in the Media. Toronto: Media Watch. | Global Media Monitoring Project (2010). *Pakistan National Report 2009-2010*. Karachi: Uks | International Women's Media Foundation Survey (1995). *Women in the Media: Facing Obstacles, Changing Attitudes*. New York. | Signorielli, N. (2001). Television's gender role images and contribution to stereotyping: Past present, future. In D. G. Singer & J. L. Singer (Eds.). *Handbook of children and the media* (pp. 341-358). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. | Signorielli, N., & Lears, M. (1992). Children, television, and conceptions chores: Attitudes and behaviors. *Sex Roles*, 27(4), 157-170. | Thompson, T. L., & Zerbinos, E. (1997). Television cartoons: Do children notice it's a boy's world? *Sex Roles*, 37(6), 415-432. |